



Government of the Cook Islands
Te Kauono Tutara e te Mana Tiaki – Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Immigration

Thursday 2 July 2020, 16:00

Cook Islands-New Zealand Joint Ministerial Forum prioritise border settings review



The Cook Islands and New Zealand concluded yesterday, via virtual platform an extraordinary Joint Ministerial Forum (JMF), within the context of COVID-19, with a focus on response and recovery. Cook Islands Deputy Prime Minister Mark Brown chaired the discussions, with New Zealand Deputy Prime Minister the Rt. Hon. Winston Peters leading for New Zealand.

Yesterday's meeting was the culmination of multiple discussions between the two governments dating back to January – at Prime Minister, Minister and senior officials levels. The most recent prior exchange before yesterday's JMF was the meeting of Senior Officials via the JMF Working Group chaired by Cook Islands Foreign Secretary Tapaeru Herrmann on the 18th June.



The JMF is the preeminent policy dialogue mechanism between the Cook Islands and New Zealand that considers and agrees bilateral cooperation priorities and activities. It convenes annually to ensure cooperation activities maintain forward momentum and remain responsive to evolving needs and issues and is provided policy support and advice via the JM Working Group led by the respective Foreign Ministries of both governments.

Discussions yesterday focused on the border settings of New Zealand and the Cook Islands with respect to COVID-19 and the economic impact of COVID-19.

On border settings, work on the creation of a 'safe travel zone' between the Cook Islands and New Zealand has been undertaken at multiple levels within both settings for a number of weeks, noting considerations are complex, multifaceted and reach across all areas of Government. Said Minister Brown, "It was a very positive discussion with Minister Peters with consensus on the primacy of our health imperatives and preserving the hard won gains New Zealand and the Cook Islands have made in going early and going hard to eliminate and mitigate against the spread of COVID-19. We agreed it necessary to remain vigilant and ensure



robust mitigation measures against risks, including border settings, given the virus continued growth elsewhere in the world. At the same time however, we committed to continuing to prioritise progression of border settings easement between ourselves given we've both for some time now been safe havens from COVID-19 and New Zealand's current border settings are having significant impact and implications on the Cook Islands health, social and economic circumstances."

Minister Brown reiterated prior

requests from the Cook Islands for the removal of quarantine requirements on arrival into New Zealand for travellers from the Cook Islands and relaxing of New Zealand's outwards travel advisory for travel to the Cook Islands. Minister Peters has tasked his officials to explore the potential for removal of the 14 day supervised quarantine for certain categories of travellers from the Cook Islands to New Zealand such as accompanying family member for health referrals; members of the judiciary; medical personnel and critical infrastructure personnel.



The Cook Islands also expressed its desire to see the early resumption of tourists from New Zealand, noting the Cook Islands current border settings had a pre-requisite of 30 days prior residence in New Zealand for entry into the Cook Islands. "We are grateful for New Zealand's sustained engagement and consideration of the Cook Islands since February on New Zealand's border settings and we look forward to continued collaboration in the coming weeks. In addition to maintaining the pre-requisite of 30 days prior residence in New Zealand for entry into the Cook Islands through to at least September, the Cook Islands will continue to limit air access to the Cook Islands via Auckland only through to December. We consider these further commitments critical to preserving and protecting a shared travel bubble with New Zealand."

Border settings and critical preparedness and response work continues apace to ensure the establishment of requisite levels of mutual trust and confidence in border control settings and public health measures through surveillance and testing regimes, including robust contact tracing systems. Minister Peters noted NZ continue to take very seriously their duty to minimize and mitigate against the risk of introducing COVID-19 to the Pacific and the Cook Islands.

This sentiment was supported by Minister Brown, who further noted that "This duty of care rests on both the Cook Islands and New Zealand. It requires of senior officials careful and detailed consideration of all risks associated with a potential 'safe travel zone' that therefore necessitates close collaboration and identification of support required to strengthen our already existing processes in



addition to a full articulation of the practical policy settings we need in place to operationalize an easing of restrictions between the Cook Islands and New Zealand. The impact of COVID-19 on the Cook Islands economy, and perhaps most significantly tourism, cannot be understated, however as we've seen globally and locally in New Zealand's own response, we cannot risk the health and wellbeing of our people by rushing prematurely into an easing of restrictions. Our officials will therefore need to work rapidly to review and assess our current levels of preparedness, and we welcome the assistance of New Zealand in this regard."

New Zealand has agreed to assist the Cook Islands with a second deployment of technical assistance from New Zealand to support a rapid review and assessment of the Cook Islands whole-of-Government systems and preparedness, inclusive strengthened border management systems and health system capability.

Officials from both sides will meet within the week to revisit outcomes of the JMF and progress agreed actions. Queries regarding this media release can be directed to Karopaerangi.ngatoko@cookislands.gov.ck

Photos:

1. 1 July 2020, Cook Islands-New Zealand Joint Ministerial Forum; L-R on ZOOM screen Jonathan Kings, NZ Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Deputy Secretary Development and Pacific Group; NZ Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Rt. Hon. Winston Peters; Cook Islands Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Hon. Mark Brown;
2. 1 July 2020, JMF, MFAI Board Room - Minister Brown
3. 1 July 2020, JMF, MFAI Board Room - Minister Brown with officials – Karo Ngatoko, Director International Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Immigration(MFAI); CKI Financial Secretary Garth Henderson; CKI Foreign Secretary Tapaeru Herrmann;
4. 7 June 2020, Teleconference between Minister Brown and Minister Peters – MFAI Board Room – Minister Brown with FinSec Henderson; Foreign Sec Herrmann and Director Ngatoko;
5. 18th June 2020, MFAI Board Room and ZOOM, JMF Working Group Meeting – at left, staff of the New Zealand High Commission – Okesene Moananu, First Secretary, NZHC; Rachel Bennett, High Commissioner, NZHC; Sarah Short; Deputy High Commissioner NZHC; Chairing Secretary Herrmann; At right – Director Ngatoko; FinSec Henderson; Josh Mitchell, MFAI Director UN, Treaties and Oceans Division; at rear Mani Mate, Manager, Development Coordination Division, MFEM